

References

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Comment on the family name for the storm petrels (Aves)

(Case 2024: see BZN **42**: 398–400; **44**, 44–45)

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In view of the debate over the family name for the storm-petrels it may be timely to recall a previous discussion of the nomenclature of the petrels. In 1964 several people working on the group, who had become concerned at the confusion which then prevailed, decided to consult the fifteen people thought to know most about the Procellariiformes to try and agree on a more consistent classification and nomenclature. While some at least were aware that Brodtkorb (1963) had recently revived the long-forgotten name OCEANITIDAE Forbes, 1881, but had not yet been followed by anyone else, nobody raised this issue in either the preliminary discussions or after the publication of the unanimous conclusions (Alexander et al., 1965, p. 145). In consequence the family name HYDROBATIDAE Mathews, 1912 has remained in almost universal use ever since; the innumerable publications using it include recent World, Holarctic, British and American Ornithologists' Unions, Chinese, South American and New Zealand check-lists, Western Palearctic, North American, African, Indian and Australian (seabird) handbooks, two out of three international seabird guides, two major anatomical and one major parasitological works. As a result of this agreement I also used it in the 'Petrel' sections of successive editions of the British Ornithologists' Union's *Dictionary of Birds* (Thomson, 1964; Campbell & Lack, 1985).

It is interesting to observe the composition of the dissentients who favour OCEANITIDAE, most of whom, with one important exception, have already been listed by Olson (BZN **44**: 44–45). Apart from palaeontologists, who with the exception of Olson himself have not made much other contribution to the study of the petrels, they start with a colleague at the Smithsonian Institution whom he does not mention, Dr G. E. Watson, who first introduced the name OCEANITIDAE to a wider audience in a guide to the birds of the Southern Ocean (Watson, 1975) which has been followed first by the authors of the Australian and South African check-lists (Condon, 1975; Clancey, 1980) and then by Harrison (1983) in an international seabird guide. It seems a pity that if Watson preferred this name he did not raise the matter when he subscribed to the statement (Alexander et al., 1965) recommending the use of HYDROBATIDAE, instead of

subsequently introducing OCEANITIDAE unilaterally at a time when it seems doubtful whether anyone could have produced a reasoned exposition of the truth of the matter before it was clarified so lucidly by Melville (1985).

My personal view (Bourne, 1987) is that most of the people directly concerned have already made one attempt to reach a consensus on the higher classification and nomenclature of the petrels, and that this has been undermined by one participant over an issue which he had ample opportunity to raise at the time, but failed to do so, subsequently taking independent action (Watson, 1975) which has helped precipitate the present situation. It seems unacceptable to now impose a change from the well-established name HYDROBATIDAE without some guarantee that this will at least lead to more stability of nomenclature than might have resulted from (for example) following first Mathews' 1934 use of the name THALASSODROMIDAE and then Brodkorb's 1963 reintroduction of OCEANITIDAE. If it were likely to lead rapidly to permanent stability either name might form an acceptable alternative to HYDROBATIDAE, but any alteration in usage now seems much more likely to lead to many years of confusion and protest before even the present hard-won level of consistency in the use of HYDROBATIDAE is regained, and personally I regard that prospect with infinite misgivings. I therefore support Melville's proposals (BZN 42: 399, para. 9).

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